



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **LEADER OF MVD BRIBERY RING SENTENCED TO OVER 17 YEARS IN PRISON**

PHOENIX – Moustapha Lotfi ElJammal, 40, of Phoenix, was sentenced here late yesterday afternoon to 17½ years in prison by U.S. District Judge David G. Campbell. ElJammal was found guilty by a jury, following a 17-day trial in February and March 2005, of 15 counts including conspiracy, altering vehicle identification numbers and transportation and sale of stolen vehicles. ElJammal was also ordered to pay restitution of \$326,333.

According to the indictment, ElJammal conspired with other defendants to steal motor vehicles from Canada and the United States. The stolen vehicles were often moved or transported to or through Arizona. Before or after a motor vehicle was stolen, the defendants searched for and found a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) from a “donor” vehicle, usually the same make, model and year as the stolen vehicle. ElJammal and other defendants would copy or acquire the donor’s VIN or other identification markings. They would then make a matching fictitious VIN plate, almost identical to the manufacturer’s original VIN plate on the donor vehicle or remove the actual VIN plate from the donor vehicle, which is known as “VIN-switching.”

ElJammal and others would remove the original VIN and other markings from the stolen vehicle and replaced them with the fictitious VIN. ElJammal and the other defendants created counterfeit title/registration documentation for each “cloned” vehicle. They then used this counterfeit documentation to obtain fraudulent title and registration documentation from the State of Arizona.

One defendant in the case, Heidi Kay Nielsen, was an employee of the Arizona Motor Vehicle Division and converted the counterfeit documentation into false and fraudulent Arizona title/registration documents. Many of the “cloned” vehicles were insured and the defendants falsely represented to law enforcement and insurance carriers that the insured vehicles had been stolen. ElJammal and the others also “salvage washed” vehicles, acquiring vehicles that had extensive damage and were no longer usable. These vehicles had their titles stamped with the word “salvage” to inform potential buyers that these vehicles were once badly damaged. These vehicles were then repaired and the “salvage” branded titles were “salvaged washed” by Nielsen to remove any references to “salvage” from the title/registration. The defendants often filed false police reports and fraudulent insurance claims to collect insurance proceeds. It was estimated that from about 1997, ElJammal and the other defendants “cloned,” “salvaged washed,” “VIN-switched” and stole at least 150 high-end motor vehicles with an estimated value of millions of dollars.

The investigation in this case was conducted by special agents of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement with assistance from the Chandler Police Department and the Arizona Department of Public Safety. The prosecution was handled by Peter Sexton and Howard Sukenic, Assistant United States Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR 02-1170-PHX-DGC  
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